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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the depiction of Alice in illustrated versions of "Alice in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll. The primary concern was to determine if the character of Alice had changed historically through the interpretation of different illustrators and to determine what the changes were and what their impact might have on the interpretation of the study. Eighteen different illustrators' versions of Alice published between 1965 and 1993 were analyzed. The analysis found that, although the character of Alice was presented differently through time, there were no major changes to the story. With the exception of two multicultural versions, Alice was always drawn in a short dress with a pinafore and sash, even when portrayed as an active girl. There have been no new interpretations of the setting since the original illustrations by John Tenniel. This probably reflects that the original illustrations are considered to be a classic that most illustrators do not want to change drastically. (Contains 15 references.) (JLB)

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Changing Images of Alice

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Changing Images of Alice

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Alice in Wonderland is one of the supreme fantasies in English literature and is, today, something of a cultural icon. We know what it means for someone to speak of "grinning like a Cheshire cat." Not too long ago a newspaper quoted a Congressman who remarked of the political labyrinth of Washington, "It gets curiouser and curiouser!" The language and images of Alice have now entered our collective consciousness.

This tale started out rather modestly as a story told by an Oxford don to amuse the three Liddell sisters, daughters of Dan Liddell of Christ Church, on July 4th, 1862. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson wrote in his diary, "I made an expedition up the river to Godstow with the three Liddells; we had tea on the bank there, and did not reach Christ Church again till half past eight" (Davis, 1972, p.8). At the request of the girls for a story, Dodgson invented the tale during the day-long outing. The children, entranced with the story, begged him to write it down. This he did and by January 1863 he had finished a manuscript which he illustrated with his own sketches; he gave this to the Liddells. Friends of the Liddells saw the manuscript and urged Dodgson to publish it; he spent the next eighteen months rewriting and polishing. Since he was indeed a serious mathematics professor, he chose to use a pseudonym for authoring *Alice in Wonderland*. In choosing a pseudonym he "latinised his Charles and transmogrified his Lutwidge" and "was destined at last to be known and beloved, all the world over by his pen-name Lewis Carroll" (De la Mare, 1930, p.58).

At the suggestion of editors at Macmillan (publishers to Oxford University), Dodgson gave up the idea of using his own drawings and asked John Tenniel, an artist/cartoonist at Punch, to illustrate the story. After some negotiation, Tenniel agreed. Dodgson sent him a photograph, not of seven year old Alice Liddell, but of another little friend, Mary Hilton Badcock, to serve as a model for the fictional Alice. The communication between author and illustrator was outwardly courteous but Tenniel found Dodgson to be irritating and relentless in proposing his ideas (Davis, 1972). Tenniel did not use live models but seems to have worked from the photograph of Mary Badcock, and he based many of his drawings on the original but less artistically competent ones drawn by Dodgson in his first version of the book (Barr, 1986). Perhaps because of this,

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Tenniel's drawings have been criticized for a certain wooden quality. "He treats Alice as a lifelike wax doll and the other characters as though they were ingenious clockwork models, probably German in origin" (Feaver, 1977, p. 15). On the other hand Tenniel took Alice seriously. "Where later illustrators snigger and exaggerate, make everything absurd and grotesque, where even Carroll in his original sketches tended to caricature, Tenniel takes the story at face value.... They are serious illustrations of funny situations; just as in dreams, though we may be doing the most absurd things, we keep our everyday appearance" (Smith, 1948, p. 23) . In retrospect, the choice of Tenniel was an inspired one. "The world has never seen a matching of work with drawing to equal the Carroll/Tenniel collaboration," said one of Carroll's biographers (Pudney, 1976, p.75). Tenniel's drawings have become the standard by which all other illustrations of *Alice* are judged. Ironically, *Alice in Wonderland* brought Dodgson more fame and recognition than all his mathematical treatises.

In 1907 the British copyright expired and eight new editions, with new illustrations, appeared that year (Barr, 1986). Since then well over a hundred artists including the surrealist Salvadore Dali have illustrated *Alice*. In fact, in the last ten years, more than fifteen new editions have appeared, including a pop-up-book and a version with illustrations by Tony Ross that are reminiscent of Gahan Wilson.

Some illustrators of Alice have been more faithful to Tenniel's interpretation while others have provided very original approaches. Through their drawings illustrators have provided varying experiences for the reader of *Alice in Wonderland*. A brief review of a century of Alices presents a group of girls, often more different than similar, culminating in a very contemporary-looking Alice in 1993. Through the artistic skill of the illustrator, each Alice presents a unique personality. Although the text of the story changes very little between publications (in fact most adhere to Carroll's original text exactly), some artists illustrate events that others ignore and therefore provide a different emphasis within the narrative. It seems most obvious to say that illustrations of Alice in most cases merely reflect the artistic style of the times in which they were drawn. However a careful analyis of the publications reveals that through the artistic interpretation of her illustrators the character of Alice changes over time. Her illustrators present a variety of individual personalities that may indicate changing cultural images of girls and young womanhood, among other things.

THE STUDY

Our primary concern was to determine if the character of Alice had changed historically through the interpretation of different illustrators and to determine what the changes were and what impact they might have on the interpretation of the story. This paper reports the results of an analysis of eighteen different illustrators' versions of *Alice in Wonderland*, and, in a few cases, of *Through the Looking Glass*, published between 1865 and 1993. Many more editions of the book were produced during that period, but we felt it was important to study only complete works that were available to us. Reproductions of single illustrations from an additional number of works were also available through other sources, but we chose not to include these illustrators in our study. Artists illustrate narratives with a concern to the unity of the

work and each single illustration comprises part of the whole. To study a single illustration without reference to the others is to remove it from its context. Our analysis therefore is only of those illustrators whose entire work we could obtain. We will, however, refer occasionally to information reported by others in secondary sources.

For our analysis we used a formalist methodology adapted from the work of Bordwell and Thompson (1986). While their work relates more specifically to film art, they describe a formalist methodogy that can be adapted for all media that use aesthetic form. Space does not allow us to describe their method, or our adaption of it, in any detail here. For further understanding we recommend reading their entire work and the work of others (e.g. Erdman, 1988). Within our analysis we considered Lewis Carroll's narrative of *Alice in Wonderland* as the formal system underlying each illustrator's work. Within each illustrator's version of *Alice* however, the text of the story interacts with the artist's unique illustrations to create a specific stylistic system. Each illustrator provides his or her own unique experience for the reader of *Alice in Wonderland*.

RESULTS

Our analysis included work of 18 different illustrators of Alice. Unfortunately, space here does not allow us to include detailed descriptions of the work of each. Instead, we will discuss the works that we feel are most significant to the interpretation of our results and will refer more briefly to others when needed.

John Tenniel originally created 42 black-and-white line drawings for Lewis Carroll's story. The illustrations were small and were designed to be placed within the text. Later, after the book became popular, he added fifteen full page illustrations which were included as colored plates tipped into the book. Those familiar with *Alice* will remember that it is a story of a little girl's whirlwind trip through a series of fantastic places and interactions with a series of bizarre, humorous characters. She falls, climbs, crawls, swims and runs through Wonderland. Carroll describes a brave child with a kind heart and considerable intelligence. She takes a deliberate and active role in the events that happen—often saving herself and sometimes rescuing others in the story—by her wits and ingenuity. Tenniel's careful line drawings certainly do not capture the complexities of Carroll's generous and heroic Alice. He illustrates her simply as a stubborn and sturdy girl. She is shown with a wasp waist, large piercing eyes and Medusa-like hair flowing from an overly large head. She is most often seen in a stiff, determined pose with an expression of dismay.

Our analysis of the plot indicates that Carroll describes at least 67 different events in the story. In reading the story one is aware of how many events vividly described by Carroll were not illustrated by Tenniel. Many delightful and vividly described images were not selected. For example, at the end of Chapter Six, Alice finds the March Hare's house, where she soon comes upon the teaparty in the yard. Carroll described the event in this way: "She had not gone much farther before she came in sight of the house of the March Hare: she thought it must be the right house, because the chimneys were shaped like ears and the roof was thatched with fur" (Carroll, 1992, p.94). This image did not find its way into Tenniel's or, surprisingly, anyone else's subsequent illustrations of the story.

After Tenniel

In 1907 eight new editions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* appeared (Barr, 1986). Two of these, one illustrated by Charles Rackham and the other by Bessie Gutmann, presented an image of Alice that was very different from Tenniel's. Arthur Rackham illustrated Alice as a slender, delicate featured, demure twelve year old with long dark blonde hair and a wistful, sad expression. She wears a white dress with large pink flowers and long black stockings. Rackham worked from a model for his illustrations (Gardener, 1960) and his Alice looks like a real girl. His work, however, strongly reflects the pre-Raphaelite and Art Deco tradition so prevalent in the early 1900's. In many of the illustrations the flowing lines of Alice's dress and hair become graceful graphic organic design elements.

A furor greeted Rackham's edition of Alice in 1907 including a cartoon and hostile remarks in Punch: "If... it were desirable or necessary to redraw Sir John Tenniel's unsurpassable and immortal illustrations to *Alice in Wonderland*, Mr. Rackham may be said to have performed the task as well as probably any draughtsman could for he is an artist with a rare sense of grotesque fancy and humour and an extraordinarily delicate and sensitive line. But it were better, we think, for him to employ his imagination upon his own rather than other men's business...." (quoted by Hamilton, 1990, p. 86).

No such criticism of Bessie Gutmann was recorded, certainly none that has survived to today, perhaps because her work is less imaginative and because she was a less well known artist. Gutmann's Alice is very different from both Tenniel's and Rackham's. She is a babyish, chubby brunette about 4 or 5 years old, with a rosebud mouth and large brown eyes. She wears a white dress, long white stockings and a blue hair ribbon and looks like a sweet, sturdy, unflappable toddler with little expression, except occasionally a look of wonder. To depict Wonderland, Gutmann mostly provided illustrations of realistically rendered animals—looking often like oversized benevolent nursery pets wearing clothes.

Continuing Interpretations

In spite of the wrath of a segment of the reading public in 1907 toward Rackham, artists continued to provide their own interpretation of the Carroll story. In 1914, A. E. Jackson portrayed Alice as a blonde 10 or 11 year old and, like Rackham, in a pink and white dress. However, compared to Rackham and Gutmann, Jackson's Alice is depicted in a variety of energetic poses with a full range of expressions including questioning and astonishment. With short white ankle socks and her hair secured in a long braid, she is often shown in expressive gestures with her arms and legs held away from her body—certainly gestures not allowed for the proper Victorian girl of earlier artists. She is shown fully interacting with events in the story, stretching on tiptoe or crouching on the ground as a physically active, athletic girl, perhaps a precursor of girl adventurers such as Nancy Drew and Trixie Belden, and certainly of later Alices.

Gwynned Hudson, in 1922, portrayed Alice as a fair blonde beauty, about nine years old, with waist-length straight hair held back with a black headband. Her bee-stung lips and oval face are reminiscent of the flapper fashion of the period. She wears a short white layered dress with puffed

sleeves and a ruffled pinafore. With the addition of a red bead necklace, her outfit seems more appropriate for a middle-class children's party than an adventure. She assumes restrained or coy girlish poses and most often is seen either merely rising to her tiptoes or bending from the waist. In Hudson's work the character of Alice is often secondary to richly colored design or black-and-white graphic elements and other characters in the story often receive major emphasis in the illustrations.

David Hall's illustrations of *Alice in Wonderland* were made at the Walt Disney studio in 1939 during the preliminary stages of planning an animated film of the story. The film was not produced at that time and Hall's work was not used when the film finally went into production in 1948. His illustrations were discovered in 1976 and published in 1986 with Lewis Carroll's text as a new edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1986). Hall's is certainly the visually richest and most lively interpretation of the story we encountered, and in spite of being drawn 54 years ago, looks surprisingly contemporary. In an Afterword in the 1986 edition, Brian Sibley reports that, according to the Disney staff, Hall's illustrations were the result of a collaborative effort of Disney's staff to produce an interpretation of the story that would "get the spirit of the book to the screen... rather than merely reproducing the appearance of the characters...." as others had done before (Carroll, 1986, p. 147). Hall's illustrations for the story include many vivid watercolors and magnificently rendered drawings of a large number of events from the story—many more than Tenniel provided, and in some instances beyond what Carroll had described. Hall's interpretation of Alice is disappointingly impersonal, however. She is drawn almost as a caricature, with the wide vacant eyes and spindly arms and legs of a doll, with little personality or character. It is the incredibly energetic renderings of the settings, fantasy characters, and events in the story that are most remarkable about Hall's work.

The image of Alice that many remember most clearly is the one from the Walt Disney film. Work was renewed on the film in 1948 and it was released in 1951. Artists at the Disney studios collaborated to create a character which included little of Hall's work except Alice's blue dress. The Disney film version of *Alice* was based on both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, but included many characters and events not in either of the Lewis Carroll stories (Carroll, 1986). The Disney studio interpreted Alice as a blandly pretty girl with a great mass of neatly coiffed very blonde hair. She is characterized as a modest, almost prissy girl. Her perfect blue skirt will never fly up to reveal too much of her petticoats and those perfect knees will never become scuffed. The perfect, almost candy coated, little girl captured few hearts or imaginations; the film was one of Disney's least popular.

Personal Interpretations

While most illustrators interpret the story of Alice with considerable regard for the Carroll/Tenniel work, for some contemporary artists the story of Alice has inspired a very personal interpretation. Leonard Weisgard's 1949 work has the overlapping images of collage with flat pastel colors and soft edges to create illustrations that have a sunny, floating, dream-like quality. Weisgard's work makes little attempt at providing narrative accuracy, combining images from various places in

the story in each illustration. Weisgard's Alice is characterized simply as a stylistically rendered, yellow-haired dreamy child with an unchanging flat expression. Her image is used most often as merely one of many design elements in the colorful, decorative illustrations.

Ralph Steadman acknowledges that he was "obsessed... with images of the Alice story for years" (Carroll, 1973, endpaper). He interpreted Alice in 1972 in a series of bold black-and-white illustrations, with visual references to Japanese woodblock illustrations, Surrealism and contemporary culture. Steadman's Alice appears to wear a Japanese kabuki mask. The major design elements in his drawings are the prominent lines of Alice's flowing Japanese-style hair.

Although John Bradley's 1992 version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* adheres closely to Carroll's text, Bradley illustrates the story with a series of drawings that are rich with political and social satire. For example, the card soldiers wear Prussian uniforms and helmets, the figures painting roses look like British working class laborers, the Mad Hatter resembles the movie actor Jack Nicholson, and the card pack in the last scene of the story is led by a figure who looks like Fidel Castro. In Bradley's work, Alice is a slender, self conscious, simple, blue-eyed adolescent. She looks like a contemporary young woman incongruously dressed in a childish white pinafore. She watches with wide-eyed surprise at the events she is witnessing.

In a very recent edition of Alice, Tony Ross illustrates *Through the Looking Glass* through a series of charming drawings that are reminescent at times, of the New Yorker illustrators of dark humor, Gahan Wilson and George Booth. Ross's 1993 Alice has the dark hair, striped stockings, and blue sailor dress of Ludwig Bemelmans' character Madeleine in the, now classic, children's stories. Like Madeleine, Ross's Alice is spunky and energetic, but Ross's drawings alway retain a humorous, slightly sinister quality.

Multicultural Influences

In 1992 two versions of *Alice in Wonderland* were published in which the main character is a girl of color. Donna Leslie illustrated Nancy Sheppard's adaptation of *Alice*. Sheppard retells the story in the language of the Pitjantjatjara people of southwestern Australia. An English translation is also provided. Titled *Alitji in Dreamland*, the story is faithful to the spirit and events of Carroll's story, but incorporates the Australian landscape, animals, plants, and Aboriginal culture. In the Sheppard story, the caterpillar becomes the Witchety Grub, and the dormouse a koala. Donna Leslie, a professionally trained artist, belongs to the Gamileroi peoples of Australia. She illustrates the story with a series of richly patterned drawings in the native style. She portrays Alitji as a naked Aboriginal girl who worries that being caught in Dreamland will prevent her from growing up and becoming a woman (Sheppard, 1992).

Whoopi Goldberg's *Alice*, illustrated by John Rocco, is a story of an African-American girl who leaves her familiar New Jersey neighborhood and goes into the fantastic land of New York in search of fortune. Goldberg's story is shorter and much less complex than Carroll's. While the book has some references to Carroll's *Alice*, both in the story and in the colorful illustrations, it is more simply the story of an adventurous girl who, after witnessing

the dangers of the corrupt, adult world, learns to cherish what she has at home.

A Modern Girl

A significant trend within the last ten years is to show Alice as a more realistic and complex girl, as an increasing number of contemporary artists present Alice in the image of real little girls. Michelle Wiggins, Michael Hague, Justin Todd, Anthony Browne, and Peter Weevers present Alices who most certainly have been modelled after real girls. Michael Hague's work is a series of beautifully rendered portraits of a real child and Peter Weevers readily acknowledges that he used his daughter, Tilia, as his model.

In these editions the artists have retained, sometimes verbatim, the text of Carroll's Victorian story and, remarkably, each also chooses for his or her own illustrations the same events as Tenniel. In each edition, one can find Alice swimming in the pool of tears, Alice's huge hand reaching through the window of the White Rabbit's house, Alice holding the flamingo croquet mallet, and Alice sitting on the beach between the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle. However, these artists illustrate Alice and her surroundings with much more detail, and with more realistic and sophisticated illustrations than are found in any earlier editions. This may be due in part to a recent increasing interest in realism in art, but certainly is due also to changing social attitudes about girls.

When Alice becomes a real girl her character becomes more human, and her story therefore, becomes more complex. These illustrators of Alice reveal the affection and respect that they have for the girls they portray. In every edition, Alice is shown as an energetic, athletic child who fearlessly interacts with the many characters in a colorful and complex interpretation of Wonderland. Unlike the Alice of earlier illustrators, she is not overwhelmed by her circumstances. In most editions she has a very realistically rendered, expressive face that shows subtle emotions, such as questioning, disgruntlement, determination and pleasure. She often makes direct and unselfconsious eye contact with the reader. In these works Alice becomes an epic heroine through the real personalities of the girls who play her role. Contemporary illustrators of Alice, in fact, portray her more in keeping with the Carroll description of her personality than did Tenniel.

Thwaites(1963) suggested that the Alice story achieves its perfect balance and certainty through the character of Alice herself. She "never changes in her nature however large or small she may grow.... Sensible, good-natured, charmingly gentle and lovable, she personifies the best traits of Victorian childhood" (p. 116). Thwaites neglected to add that Alice is also brave, generous, and heroic. Tenniel did not adequately portray these characteristics of Alice. Perhaps the visual language of the Victorian times did not have the means to adequately describe the phenomenon of Alice as an active girl who determined her circumstances. Or perhaps Tenniel did not have the imagination or skill to create the illustrations that would do so. Or, perhaps more likely, Tenniel did not have the desire, or authorization to go very far beyond Dodgson's first awkward illustrations of the story.

CONCLUSION

More than a century of illustrators have presented their changing images of

Alice, the girl who takes a whirlwind trip through a fantasy place called Wonderland. Although each edition has changed the look of the original, our analysis of this work indicates that, although the character of Alice has been presented differently, ranging from a Victorian good girl image to the contemporary heroine of the last ten years of illustrators, much in fact has not changed from the first version *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. With the exception of the multicultural versions by Sheppard and Goldberg, Alice always wears a short dress with a pinafore or wide sash. Even very contemporary illustrators who show her as a complex and active girl dress her in an outfit which is more appropriate for a party than an outdoor adventure.

While the character of Alice has been interpreted differently, much of the setting of Tenniel's illustrations remains, even with very contemporary artists. In 1982, Darton noted that no new illustrators have "invented a new Gryphon, or a new Mock Turtle, White Rabbit, March Hare, Hatter, Caterpillar, Cheshire Cat, Red queen, White Knight. These are essentially, and must always remain so, the creation of the first artist and of the author whose fantasy provided the vivid details. A twentieth-century heroine merely accentuates that fact (Darton, 1982, p.258). This fact remains true eleven years later, as well. The events later artists choose to illustrate are the same ones that Tenniel illustrated.

The furor which greeted Rackham's illustrations in 1907 probably reflected the fact that in just forty years Tenniel's interpretation of *Alice* had become an archetypal image. The Carroll/Tenniel collaboration remains a classic that later illustrators did not want to, or could not alter too drastically. Illustrators choose Tenniel's images because they are central to the work; they are the embodiment of the work. As with any classic, very different interpretations would be inappropriate. Illustrators since Tenniel provide their interpretations of Tenniel's work in much the same way that artists through the ages have interpreted the work of the earlier masters: often with reverence.

STUDY WORKS

Following is a list of the works used in our study. This list provides the works in chronological order by illustrator and includes a full bibliographic reference. Note that several of the citations list later publications, and in some cases facsimiles, of an earlier work.

1865 John Tenniel

Carroll, L. (1977). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

1907 Bessie Pease Gutman

Carroll, L. (1907). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* New York: Dodge Publishing Co.

1907 Arthur Rackham

Carroll, L. (1978). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* New York: Weathervane Books.

1914 A. E. Jackson

Carroll, L. (1914). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Co.

1922 Gwynned Hudson

Carroll, L. (1992). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* London: Studio Editions.

1939 David Hall.

Carroll, L. (1986). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

1951 Walt Disney Co.

Disney, W. (Producer), Geronomi, C., Luske, H. & Jackson, W. (Directors). (1951). *Alice in Wonderland* (film). Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Co.

1949 Leonard Weisgard

Carroll, L. (1949). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

1972 Ralph Steadman

Carroll, L. (1973). *Through the Looking Glass*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter.

1983 Michelle Wiggins

Carroll, L. (1989). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. New York: Alfred E. Knopf.

1985 Michael Hague

Carroll, L. (1985). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

1986 Justin Todd

Carroll, L. (1987). *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. New York: Schocken Books.

1988 Anthony Browne

Carroll, L. (1988). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

1989 Peter Weevers

Carroll, L. (1989). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. New York: Philomel Books.

1992 John Bradley

Carroll, L. (1992). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Philadelphia: Running Press.

1992 Donna Leslie

Sheppard, N. (1992). *Alitji in Dreamland or Alitjinya Ngura Tjukurmankuntjala*. Berkeley, CA.: Ten Speed Press.

1992 John Rocco

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literature: Views and reviews, (pp. 57-63). New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1973.

Erdman, B. (1988). *Lesson into film.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Feaver, W. (1977). *When we were young: Two centuries of children's book illustration.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Gardner, M. (1960). *The annotated Alice.* New York: Bramhall.

Hamilton, J. 1990). *Arthur Rackham: A biography.* New York: Arcade.

Moser, B. (1987). *Artist at work: Illustrating the classics.* Horn Book Magazine. 63:703-709.

Pudney, J. (1976). *Lewis Carroll and his world.* New York: Scribner's.

Smith, J. A. (1948). *Children's illustrated books.* London: Collins.

Thwaites, M. F. (1963). *From primer to pleasure in reading.* Boston: Horn Book.

White, C. (1984). *The world of the nursery.* New York: Dutton.

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